

*Presented to the Congl. Library,
by Rev. Geo. M. Adams, D.D.*

15.0.7
5646

FUNERAL SERMON

15.0.7
564 }
OF

MRS. REBECCA FRENCH,

WIDOW OF

REV. JONATHAN FRENCH, D. D.,

Delivered at the Congregational Church, North Hampton, N. H.,
February 6th, 1869.

BY REV. T. V. HAINES.

EXETER:

PRINTED AT THE NEWS-LETTER OFFICE, WATER STREET.

1869.



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2010 with funding from
Boston Regional Library System

FUNERAL SERMON

OF

MRS. REBECCA FRENCH,

WIDOW OF

REV. JONATHAN FRENCH, D. D.,

Delivered at the Congregational Church, North Hampton, N. H.,
bFebruary 6th, 1869.

BY REV. T. V. HAINES.

EXETER:

PRINTED AT THE NEWS-LETTER OFFICE, WATER STREET.
1869.

REMARKS.

The preacher was assisted in the funeral services by Rev. I. T. Otis of Exeter, who performed the introductory exercises; by Rev. E. D. Eldridge of Kensington, who offered prayer; by Rev. A. Tobey D. D. of Durham, who gave interesting reminiscences, and briefly spoke of the self-distrust of the deceased, and by Rev. J. O. Barrows of Exeter, her former pastor, who very touchingly referred to the cordial greeting Mrs. French gave him when he first came to North Hampton, to the pleasure of her society and to her loveliness of character.

SHE HATH DONE WHAT SHE COULD.—MARK, XIV: 8.

What is true life, and what its design, except to believe on, and labor for Christ? To trust and to make up the substance of holy living—To be good and do good are both the beginning and end of duty. The divine requirements are met, if there have been full consecration and untiring devotion. In this world we show our love by our actions, both to man and God. Activity for and toward the object of love is a law of the soul. The Saviour recognized this when the devoted Mary poured the precious nard upon his head. It has been an acknowledged principle in all ages of the world. Indeed, under the present economy there can be no other mode by which intelligencies can express themselves, one to the other. Unselfish and unceasing activity will never be shown toward any being for whom there is no love. Such activity was a component of the life of Christ. Christian life, which must be an attempted imitation of the all-perfect Example, is not made up of a few flaming deeds. It consists not wholly in now and then a bold and daring stroke for the cause of the Redeemer. It is characterized by uniform and quiet deeds. The life-labor of the true believer may have but little of the sensational, but it will be filled, daily, with holy purposes, with work well done, and modest evidences of a loving heart. A Niagara may thunder and foam and awe-inspire the beholder, but it is calmer water that bears commerce, and has green and productive shores. A rocket is dazzling as it rushes up through the dark air, but we prefer the steady, though humbler light, which constantly reveals our path, and is never painful to our eyes. So great deeds of daring, even if they give strong momentum to the cause of right, are not to be preferred above those little acts of life which are thoroughly savored with the spirit of Christ. But few have the opportunity, even if they have the ability to perform, what men call *great deeds*, for the glory of God:

while all persons are so conditioned in life that their common acts may have a border of heavenly glory. And is it not true, that those deeds which sometimes astonish the world, are much inferior in the eyes of God, to the common experiences of *that life* where the human will lies passive in the divine? However that may be, with all men, the ordinary, and sometimes unnoticable acts, constitute the greater part of outward manifest love to God, and frequently when the loving heart regards the act as poor service, God considers it of the very highest worth. To anoint the Saviour's head was, doubtless, regarded by Mary as a very unworthy expression of love, but Christ says "Whosoever this gospel shall be preached throughout the whole world, this also that she hath done shall be spoken of for a memorial of her."

It is not the magnitude of the act; it is the depth of love in the heart that receives divine approval. The giving of a "cup of cold water" only, will be followed by a rich reward. Assistance rendered to God's children is assistance rendered to Christ. Those almost unnoticable acts of christians which come spontaneously from a loving heart, those outgushings of a full soul which render relief to other souls, those unpremeditated acts, when a whole volcano of love pours forth, and is felt in a thousand little deeds which are designed to alleviate human suffering, and give sunshine to human life; such are what God looks upon with the tenderest approbation. Some of the sweetest and most heavenly lives are never marked with any very showy deeds, neither do their influences seemingly reach out far into the great world of intelligencies. Great worldly popularity is not necessarily the high way to holy living. The heart may be as radiant in love while engaged in the ordinary duties of life, as it would be if lifted above the ordinary level. Christ was just as divine when he called Peter, James and John from their fishing nets, as when he preached the sermon on the mount; just as divine when he wept over Jerusalem, as when he called Lazarus from the grave; just as divine when he talked with the woman of Samaria, as when he drove the great number of traffickers from the temple. So the spirit of his life may be as clearly exhibited in the most humble, as in the most exalted sphere of worldly action. The smallest deed of love may be as fragrant with the breath of heaven, as the greatest act of charity. The rich pharisee who cast abundantly into the Lord's treasury, had less credit above, than the poor widow who gave her two mites. It is not of so much account with God

how great the gift, as the sincerity of the spirit by which it is bestowed. He regards not the largeness but the lovingness of the act. The heart that shows its love to the extent of its ability in that respect, does all that angels do. The divine smiles are proportionally as radiant to the soul that in childlike faith pours the costly nard upon the head of Jesus, as of the highest arch-angel who has looked deeply into the mysteries of creation and providence, and whose place is nearest to the eternal throne. Of course the divine glory is really brighter to the chief created spirit, than to the believing probationer, but in proportion as there is obedience to God's law, and spiritual strength to perceive and appreciate the divine presence, so is the radiance of his glory. The service of the brightest seraph is no more acceptable than the service of the humblest whole hearted christian. It is higher; it is purer; but it is no more fully approbated. To willingly and cheerfully give all, denotes the same state of heart, whether the life be the most obscure conceivable in this world, or whether it be the highest and most conspicuous in the world of glory.

No greater encomium can be bestowed on any soul, than when it is truthfully said "She hath done what she could." All the praises of the world, all the eulogies from human lips, or the most eloquent panegyric can be no true substitute for a life of loving and holy deeds. Every worldly honor, and a striking profession vividly colored by the imagination of ardent friends, are dark and dead by the side of an active earnest life, whose principal feature has been holy trust, and loving works. What one pretends in life is comparatively of little account. The praiseworthy part is the doing. The pretention of one person may eclipse all other men, but if there is not holy fruit, it is a stain, instead of a jewel. On the other hand a person may disclaim all merit of goodness, but, if the "life is hid with Christ in God," and the retiring disciple shows a Christly spirit in deeds of kindness and love, in tender regard for others' feelings, in offering sympathy to the sorrowing, in cheering despondent hearts, and reviving courage in the care-worn and disappointed, or in casting heavenly sunbeams into social and domestic life, then there is in some sense, a reproduction of the Saviour's life.

In reviewing the life of others, it is always just to take their deeds. By such we ordinarily enter the inner life, and can quite correctly judge of the principles which they loved. When such deeds indicate a spirit born of heaven, and when they are so numerous as to show that they crowded all the earth-days of the actor, we may truthfully say that such an one fulfilled the design of his being.

Now if such is a correct standard of judgment, ~~X~~ a life filled with loving and unselfish acts, although many of them were unstudied and soon forgotten, and are all the more fragrant and brilliant because they were spontaneous and regarded unworthy of remembrance, then do we not find in the long and useful life of our universally loved and now sainted mother in Christ, abundant reason for saying with much emphasis "She hath done what she could." If doing good to others is the same as doing it to Christ, and if the Saviour approbated Mary for the strongest possible expression of regard, must we not believe that he looked with approbation upon her who seemed so near and dear and motherly to all in this community?

Her long life was filled with good deeds, and marked with a spirit of more than ordinary patience, resignation and trust. She was born in Lincoln, Mass., Dec. 21st 1785, being the youngest child of Samuel and Mercy Farrar who attained respectively to the age of 94 and 79 years. She had one sister and three brothers. The sister died in early life. One brother, John Farrar, who was professor in Harvard College, died at the age of 69 years. The other two brothers, each attained to about 90 years. Having had pious parents, she was well instructed in early life in religious things. Her very amiable natural disposition was made more lovely and attractive by divine grace, though at what period, she never could tell, as she could not recollect any definite time when she experienced a particular change in her feelings. She was one of those whose outward life was so uniform and high toned, that there would be no very marked change to the common observer, and her sense of dependence upon God, arising from her early education, was so strong that it is not surprising she was unable to say *just* when she was changed from nature to grace. When she was about 16 years of age, her brother put into her hands "Doddridge's Rise and Progress" which she read with much interest, and felt, then, that her life was growing in conformity with its teachings and suggestions. She said she was then sensible that she loved holy things, and hated evil. The sun of righteousness had risen upon her mind although she had not noted its first morning beams. When at the age of 18 years, she united with the church in her native town, from which church she removed her relation to this. It should be remembered that she joined the church at a very early age, compared with the common practice of those times. On Dec. 4th, 1804, when about 19 years of age she was married to Rev. Jonathan French, afterwards Rev. Dr. French, the honored and beloved pastor of this church for more than fifty years, who then had been ordain-

ed over this church some more than three years. Two days after their marriage, she came with her husband to this town. She had never before visited the place. When journeying to their field of future labor, they were met by an escort from the parish at the bridge at Newburyport, and when they arrived at the town line between Hampton and North Hampton, a very large number of citizens joined the company. It was a cordial and highly demonstrative reception. In the evening there was a very large gathering of members of the parish in the parsonage house which had just been completed for them. Here she commenced the arduous, and in many respects, peculiarly trying labors of a pastor's wife. She was to an eminent degree, a help-meet for her husband. Her gentleness of manners, her evenness of disposition, and her earnest piety, arising from her firm faith in God, admirably adapted her to her place, and caused a most genial and healthy influence to be shed over her family, and the circle of her acquaintance. She was early interested in, and cordially seconded all those plans of her husband, formed for the promotion of the spiritual welfare of this people. She was one to help establish more than 60 years ago, the Thursday evening prayer meeting, which has been and now is such a source of health and strength. She was instrumental in bringing into operation in the parish, April 29th, 1814, the "Female Charitable Society," whose avowed object was to render aid to needy persons, or causes of benevolence. As an outgrowth of that, she caused to be started in 1818, and afterwards mainly directed, a "Juvenile Society" which rendered aid in the education of heathen children. Oct. 15th, 1830, she united with several of the wives of neighboring ministers in establishing a "Female Association," which met semi-annually and had as its principal object the spiritual quickening of its members, and the encouragement of the pastors of the churches. She was active in bringing into operation the greatly useful and much loved "Maternal Association" which was organized March 4th, 1835. She was its first Treasurers. The amount of good accomplished by her in that direction will not be fully known until the great day of account. The "Ladies Cent Society," auxiliary to that of the State, was organized mainly through her efforts, in July 1845.

To accomplish so much, beyond the labors and cares, necessarily arising in a large family, must have required great activity and perseverance. A more delicate constitution, probably, would have broken down. Christian labor to her was not irksome. It would have

been a source of sorrow, had she, by any circumstance, been excluded from it. There can be no doubt, that her active life, as a pastor's wife, is like a little oasis in the memory of many of the members of this church. And who shall say just how effectual were her words, her influence and example in convincing many, now living in this community, of the exceeding sinfulness of sin, and in leading them to seek the Saviour?

In her more retired life a few years prior to, and during the time since the death of Dr. French she exhibited to all her acquaintances that same loving and lovely character. To the stranger who was for the first time introduced to her society, and to those who had been favored with long and intimate acquaintance, she had the same magnetic charm, only, perhaps, it seemed stronger and more delightful to those who were most familiar. Her interest in others was so great, her sympathy with the sorrowing and her joy with the prospered, there was so little of self, and so much of benevolence in her life and character, that I think it safe to say, she had not a known enemy. Never have I heard any person speak of her, except in the very highest terms of praise. Her gratitude for favors received was almost unbounded, and her joy, when permitted to aid others, was scarcely less expansive. She had a deep interest in the welfare of this church to the time of her death. Indeed this whole community seemed to her some like her own family. And it is worthy of record, that all in this community regarded her as a lovely mother in Israel. She frequently remarked that if prayers and good nursing would keep her alive, she should live a long time.

Neither was her acquaintance, influence, or love bounded by this parish or town. She was quite extensively known beyond her home sphere, and abroad her acquaintance was appreciated, and her worth highly prized.

Her christian life was uniform, fruitful of good works and growing in the spirit of the master. In her last days, her soul looked out as upon a calm, serene, summer sky. When apparently brought very near the grave, not quite two months ago, one day she said, "I seem to feel the Saviour's arms around me,"—meaning, of course, that Christ was as supporting to her soul, as any friendly physical arm could be to her body. She repeatedly said, during her last days, "I hope I may not dishonor my Saviour by any impatience or murmuring, or in any way." She appeared to have no fear of death. Indeed she remarked that for forty years she had looked forward to

death with pleasure. She remarked to me one day, "I do not wish my friends to pray for my life, but that I may be entirely submissive to the will of my heavenly Father." At another time she remarked to those around her "If I were to express my natural feelings, it would be to depart, which would be far better." "Every day brings me nearer to my God, if I am on the way to heaven." She would at times break out in ejaculatory prayer "Leave me not, O, my dear Saviour to darkness of mind; enlighten my mind in the knowledge of thy truth; give me a heart to love and serve thee." Her physical distress was sometimes great, but she was not known to murmur or complain. She expressed her resignation by saying "I desire no will but His. Lord in thine own time and way, take me to thyself." Some of her last days were replete with similar ejaculations and sentiments.

Her long life of activity was an unbroken testimony for Christ, and the full assurance of faith which she possessed in her last days, bespoke the "crown of life" which is the heavenly reward of well doing here. She died calmly, like one going to rest. Her life will be fragrant in our memories, and we, through the revelation of the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ, can now look upon her as having passed over into the "land of pure delight," and as at rest with the Saviour whom she so dearly loved while on earth. What a life was hers, long, abundantly useful, and daily marked with trust! What a life she now is living! Ah! earthly thoughts and earthly language are not lofty enough to picture that life.

"Beyond this vale of tears,
There is a life above,
Unmeasured by the flight of years,
And *all that life is love.*"

Mrs. Rebecca French died on the 3d instant, consequently she lived a little more than eighty-three years in this world. All her children, eleven in number, are now living. There are forty-one grand-children and nine great-grand-children living. As an expression of feeling for her children, and a legacy of love and advice, she chose the apostle's touching and comprehensive benediction, "Farewell. Be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you."—2 Cor. XIII: 11.

The most of her generation are gone. A very few of equal, or even greater age are now waiting "to hear the keel upon the shore," but the great majority have passed to that state from which none ever return. All the members of this church who received her into church

covenant and fellowship, when she came to this town, have died. But one person is living in town who is known to have been present at the reception given at the parsonage, on the evening of their arrival. One worthy senior deacon, then a little boy, now an old man, is the solitary link, between the present and that memorable occasion. Such is life. We play our part for a little while upon its stage, and then are seen no more on earth.

We mourn for the departed, because we shall miss her sunny smiles, her cheering words, her sympathy and her prayers. We shall miss her holy influence. We shall miss her in unnumbered ways. We are bereft of her presence, and sorrow because we shall see her face no more, but we will think of her as being with the angels, as singing with the redeemed, as clothed with light and glory, and as in the presence of her Saviour; and we will hear her, by her example in word and deed, by her sweet and tender influence, and by all the winning graces of her heart, calling upon us from the upper skies, bidding us do the work of life, that we may meet her in the world of perfect bliss and glory. We look over her life and say, "She hath done what she could." We drop the tear over her grave, for we feel that we have lost a friend. But our hearts swell with gratitude at the thought, that if we love as she loved, and serve as she served, we shall soon be as she now is, in heaven.

As we wreath loving reflections around her memory, let us by the example of her life, become strong in the faith, and active of the right. Let the noble principles and deeds of her life be reproduced in ours. We lay her not away in the grave. She is not here. The casket lies before us, but the jewel has been taken to be a pillar in the temple of our God.

Be comforted mourning friends. This is not all of life. The Saviour who supported her in trouble, is offering support to you. Lean on his arm, cherish his sympathy and in a little while you with her and all the redeemed will stand "without fault before the throne of God."





